

U.S. Senator Coons on the Promise of Africa's Next Generation

Next week, the world will mark Africa Day, a celebration of the founding of the precursor to the African Union, the Organization of African Unity. As we look back and commemorate this monumental event, we have the opportunity to look forward as well, to the promise of Africa's next generation.

Africa's greatest asset is its remarkable people, and participants in the Young African Leaders Initiative include some of the continent's best and the brightest.

As a young man, I had the privilege of working and living in Africa, and as the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa, I've had the opportunity to engage with some of Africa's most promising leaders, discussing ways we can continue to partner together. For instance, every year I've hosted a conference in my home state of Delaware to bring together people representing the faith and diaspora communities, business, academia, and advocacy organizations. This year more than 1,200 people, including former U.S. President Bill Clinton, came together and demonstrated the deep interest in Africa across my home state of Delaware, and in nearly every state across America.

With growing economies, burgeoning populations, and an expanding middle class, I'm excited about what Africa's future holds. Today, sub-Saharan Africa is home to seven of the 10 fastest-growing economies in the world, with growth predicted to increase from 4.9 percent last year to about 5.5 percent in 2014. Much of this growth is due to Africa's global partnerships. As trade with the rest of the world has tripled over the last decade, exports have increased more than 200 percent, and imports have grown 250 percent.

We're at a pivotal point where African leaders must do more to address challenges slowing further economic growth, including corruption and insufficient infrastructure, access to electricity, intraregional trade, and governance. American business leaders tell me regularly that, even with Africa's enormous economic potential, these challenges limit investment on the continent.

Deeper collaboration between the United States and Africa will strengthen our economies now and in the future. In Congress, [I have advocated for specific ways of doing so](#), including the strengthening and reauthorization of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Since its original passage in 2000, AGOA has been critical to boosting trade and improving trade capacity and governance. As the U.S. Congress considers reauthorization of AGOA - hopefully well in advance of its September 2015 expiration - I'm looking forward to improving the legislation to diversify trade, improve utilization, and deepen our economic partnerships.

While we depend on AGOA to increase African imports to the United States, we must also work to increase U.S. exports to Africa. This will require partnering with African countries to lift barriers to trade by modernizing infrastructure and transportation, as well as eliminating African bans on products like poultry. Such measures will not only benefit Africa's global trading partners, but will also help to increase regional trade, which accounts for only 11 percent of total trade on the continent.

Sustainable economic growth and true partnership must be built on the vision and collaboration of Africa's future leaders. If you want to see a nation's future, look to its young people – and if you want to see Africa's future, we need look no further than the extraordinary YALI Network. By bringing together and empowering some of the most innovative and forward thinkers across Africa, I'm hopeful about what we can do, together, to build a stronger and more prosperous Africa in the future.

Chris Coons is the junior senator from the U.S. state of Delaware. He serves on the U.S. Senate's Appropriations, Budget, Foreign Relations and Judiciary committees and chairs the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs and the Judiciary Subcommittee on Bankruptcy and the Courts. Visit his [website](#) to learn more.

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Visions for the Future

Fascinated by the buildings and other structures she noticed during her family drives, young Saba Bisrat would think, "I wonder how that was constructed." Saba, now 26, lives in Addis Ababa and is a member of the YALI Network.

Saba carried her curiosity about buildings forward, eventually earning a bachelor's degree in construction technology and management from Addis Ababa University. Willing to take on challenges, after graduating she founded a construction company that focused on using alternative building methods.

"I have learned that persistence, drive and passion will fuel you to learn more — nothing is impossible," she says.

She credits the YALI Network for "bringing together like minds in one platform to discuss burning issues and to seek solutions together."

"I hope to learn about the different ongoing projects run by people on the platform so we can seek advice from one another and know whose door to knock on when troubleshooting," she says.

Saba now works for Revo Construction and TKM Maestro Technology PLC and volunteers with AIESEC, an international student-run leadership group.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Saba Bisrat

Learning to Be a Better Communicator

YALI Network member Edda Zekarias of Addis Ababa is always on the lookout for a story to tell.

Rarely without her camera, Edda says that by watching, listening to and learning from others she has become a more effective communicator. Photography “helps give life to my writing,” she says. “It helps me tell stories and bond with grass-roots communities.”

Edda says another way she learns is by belonging to the YALI Network. “I am able to read about active youth across Africa,” the 30-year-old says, adding that the continent “is steadily building youth who are passionately helping societies and communities.”

“YALI has done a great job of helping African youth speak a similar language and this, in my opinion, is wonderful.”

Edda also values travel. She says it has helped her understand the dynamics of culture and what makes people “similar and yet diverse.”

She believes youth need to embrace the quiet qualities of leadership — like patience, critical thinking and peaceful negotiation. “I hope for enlightened African youth who resort to constructive criticism built around proper dialogue.”

With a background in world history and peace and conflict studies, Edda works at the Ethiopia office of the United Nations Development Programme.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Edda Zekarias

Export Competitiveness and Facilitation

This is part of a series of brief articles on trade in Africa. During his recent trip to Africa, Secretary of State John Kerry spoke about the importance of trade.

Exporting is critical for transforming small and medium-size economies. Exports provide businesses the opportunity to increase their production, offer more jobs and reduce unit production costs.

According to the 2014 *African Transformation Report*, released by the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET), exporting enables countries to make the most of their comparative advantages to generate better incomes for workers and produce profits that can be used to invest in the technology and skills training needed to boost production capacity.

The ACET report notes that leaders who want a viable export strategy for sub-Saharan Africa should focus on adding value to agricultural products, develop industries to improve the value of raw

commodities and promote links along value chains. They should also support nontraditional and new export products and services like tourism.

In Africa, the costs of trading are higher than in other regions. Reducing costs like customs and insurance fees would boost the competitiveness of Africa's companies and allow them to export more, ACET notes.

To reduce costs, ACET recommends simplifying and standardizing export and import regulations, reducing the number of border crossings, and building better physical infrastructure like ports, rail and roads so more goods can reach more customers.

Photo credit: Shutterstock

New Leaders Can Transform Africa

This is part of a series of brief articles on trade in Africa. During his recent trip to Africa, Secretary of State John Kerry spoke about the importance of trade.

African economies are growing. But in order to transform these economies so they can eradicate extreme poverty, African leaders need to diversify production, make exports competitive, increase production and upgrade technology, according to the 2014 *African Transformation Report*, released in March by the policy institute African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET).

"Economies will then become much more prosperous, less dependent on foreign assistance and much more resilient to shocks," K.Y. Amoako wrote in the report. Amoako is the founder of ACET and a former executive secretary of the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa.

ACET states that the U.N. panel on the post-2015 development agenda has identified four things African leaders need to do to transform their economies. First is to create opportunities for productive and stable jobs to make growth inclusive.

Second, the panel says that African leaders should help their countries raise productivity and sustain growth by intensifying agriculture and industry, and by expanding services.

"An essential part of economic transformation is acquiring the capability to produce a widening array of goods and services and then choosing which ones to specialize in based on international relative prices," ACET says in its report.

Third, the panel advises Africans to create an environment for business to flourish and to connect with major domestic, regional and international markets. And fourth, the panel says that African leaders need to find new ways of producing and consuming that protect the environment.

What is Social Entrepreneurship?

Employing tactics from government, civil society and the private sector, social entrepreneurship seeks to address social issues through collaborative creation and widespread adoption of new solutions.

Social entrepreneurs see social issues as opportunities to create positive change. They aim to achieve this change by developing innovative yet pragmatic solutions — new products, services or processes — that fundamentally alter and improve the status quo. Such solutions are capable not only of reaching more people but also of sustaining themselves financially. That is, while social entrepreneurs seek to create social value, they also generate financial value to reinvest in their venture, thereby expanding it to help more people.

Just as entrepreneurship is vital to the economy, social entrepreneurship is vital to society. By tackling social issues and achieving scalable, sustainable impact, social entrepreneurship can create a more equitable society. By providing innovative solutions to society's unmet needs, social entrepreneurs can help spur sustainable human and economic development.

Photo Credit: Echoing Green NYC/[Flickr](#)

How Is Social Entrepreneurship Different?

Social entrepreneurship differs from traditional entrepreneurship in many ways. One key way to distinguish a traditional entrepreneur from a social entrepreneur is through the goal he hopes to achieve. While the traditional entrepreneur aims to create a product, service or process for which a consumer will pay, the social entrepreneur aims to create a product, service or process from which society will benefit. In essence, traditional entrepreneurs aim to create commercial value where social entrepreneurs aim to create social value.

Furthermore, because social entrepreneurs are tackling issues such as the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, the outcomes of their success can be more rewarding. While a success in the business world can mean more money for investors, success in social entrepreneurship can mean saving lives — and fundamentally improving the world.

The work of social entrepreneurs also differs from that of civil society organizations. While philanthropists, social activists and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also work toward the creation of social value, they achieve that social value in different ways.

Philanthropists and social activists use influence — whether from financial contributions, political clout or public pressure — to create social value. NGOs deploy products, services or processes within the status quo to create social value. But social entrepreneurs go above and beyond: They create social value by generating innovative solutions that establish a completely new — and improved — status quo. And rather than funding through donations, social entrepreneurs reinvest their revenue into their ventures.

Photo Credit: [Echoing Green NYC/Flickr](#)

Could You Be a Social Entrepreneur?

- Are you perceptive? Can you see an opportunity for change when others see a stubborn social issue?
- Are you determined? Can you devote your life to pursuing this opportunity for change?
- Are you innovative? Can you develop new yet practical solutions to solve this social issue?
- Are you courageous? Can you withstand the wear and the risk of repeated failure?
- Are you results-oriented? Can you establish measurable outcomes, using data to refine your approach and enhance your impact?

Photo Credit: [Deutsche Welle/Flickr](#)

Generation Good

A generation plans to change the world. Millennials — or 18- to 29-year-old Americans — are anxious to get jobs, but given a choice, they favor jobs they figure might make the world a better place. They grew up in the digital age, making them well aware of the world's problems.

Today's university students, especially, have a do-gooder mission, and fulfilling that mission is more

important to them than having children or a prestigious career, acquiring wealth or becoming community leaders, according to Cliff Zukin, professor of political science at Rutgers University. Their sensibility is sure to affect how businesses operate because, by 2020, millennials will make up nearly half the workforce.

“My generation has been imbued with a sense of responsibility,” said millennial Allison McGuire of the Companies for Good blog. “We grew up learning that our actions directly affect our communities.” As workers, millennials hope to nudge their employers to take responsibility for employees, for society and for the world, she said.

But millennials are not idealistic fools. According to a 2012 survey conducted by Zukin for Net Impact, an advocacy group, the recession of the late 2000s made the millennial generation care about survival in the labor market more than anything else, including their change-the-world aspirations. Job security and a good work/life balance surpass their altruistic desires.

Still, Zukin argues, that is “quite unusual for those in their early 20s, who are supposed to be so self-confident and entrepreneurial.” As the economy improves, he believes, the younger generation will re-focus on making a difference and seek jobs allowing them to do that.

Photo Credit: Women’s Technology Empowerment Centre/[Flickr](#)

VIDEO: Echoing Green asks: What's Your Problem?

Entrepreneurs see problems as opportunities. Inadequate access to potable water, lack of critical infrastructure, inability to secure bank loans – these are all opportunities for entrepreneurs to create positive social change. The nonprofit Echoing Green helps these social entrepreneurs solve society’s most intractable problems by providing seed funding and technical assistance. Watch the video to see what problems Echoing Green fellows are turning into opportunities.
